

**WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:**

1. A handheld toothbrush comprising a brush head and an adjoining handle, wherein the brush head includes:

a first set of bristle tufts arranged near a forward free end of the brush head and comprising at least one bristle tuft extending away from a bristled surface of the brush head;

5 a second set of bristle tufts immediately rearward of the first set, the second set comprising several bristle tufts protruding from the bristled surface, arranged serially on a ring, and extending in a circumferential direction of the ring at an angle of inclination relative to the bristled surface, the second set further comprising at least one further tuft protruding from the bristled surface and extending within the bristle tufts arranged on the ring; and

10 a third set of bristle tufts immediately rearward of the second set, the third set comprising several bristle tufts which protrude from the surface and are arranged serially on a ring, the bristle tufts of the third set inclined in a circumferential direction in opposition to the inclination of the bristle tufts of the second set.

15 2. The handheld toothbrush of claim 1, wherein the third set further comprises at least one further tuft that extends within the tufts disposed on the ring of the third set.

20 3. The handheld toothbrush of claim 1, wherein the respective working ends of the bristle tufts of the second and third sets disposed within the rings form a nearly continuous surface.

4. The handheld toothbrush of claim 3, wherein the continuous surface of the bristle tufts of the second and third sets is obtained by fanning out the free ends of the bristle tufts.

25 5. The handheld toothbrush of claim 1, wherein the bristle tufts of the second and third sets located on the rings are inclined at similar angles of inclination relative to the surface of the brush head.

30 6. The handheld toothbrush of claim 5, wherein the angle of inclination of each bristle tuft on the rings of the second and third sets is between about 5 and 12 degrees.

7. The handheld toothbrush of claim 6, wherein the angle of inclination is between about 7.5 and 8.5 degrees.

35 8. The handheld toothbrush of claim 1, wherein the bristle tufts of the second and third sets located on the rings have a first common length that is greater than a second common length of the further bristle tufts lying within the rings.

40 9. The handheld toothbrush of claims 1, wherein a respective fourth set of bristle tufts extending transversely to the longitudinal direction of the brush head adjoins each of the first, second and third sets of bristle tufts.

45 10. The handheld toothbrush of claim 9, wherein the bristle tufts of the fourth set are comprised of spaced apart bristle tufts in a side-by-side array, the spaced apart bristle tufts having a greater hardness than the bristle tufts of the first, second, and third sets.

50 11. The handheld toothbrush of claim 10, wherein the bristle tufts of the second and third sets located on the rings have a first common length that is greater than a second common length of the further bristle tufts lying within the rings.

12. The handheld toothbrush of claim 11, wherein the bristle tufts of the fourth set have a third common dimension of length between the first common length and the second common length.

55 13. The handheld toothbrush of claim 12, wherein the bristle tufts of the fourth set protrude upwardly substantially vertically from the surface of the brush head.

60 14. The handheld toothbrush of claim 1, wherein a forward bristle tuft of the first set is inclined towards the free forward end of the brush head, extending at a non-perpendicular angle relative to the surface of the brush head.

15. The handheld toothbrush of claim 14, wherein the first set is comprised of six bristle tufts whose free ends terminate on a common plane inclined at an angle relative to the surface of the brush head, the common plane extending above a second plane formed by the free ends of the second and third sets of bristle tufts.

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16. The handheld toothbrush of claim 15, wherein individual bristle tufts are of an essentially circular cross-section.

17. The handheld toothbrush of claim 16, wherein cross sections of bristle tufts disposed on the rings of the second and third sets are essentially of a first area and cross-sections of other bristle tufts are essentially of a second area, wherein the second area is greater than the first area.

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